

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00
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INT-05 IO-13 TRSE-00 /086 W
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O R 162210Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8948
INFO DIA WASHDC J2
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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, BL
SUBJ: HUNGER STRIKE WIDENS

REF: LA PAZ 0329

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING REJECTION BY GOB OF HUNGER STRIKERS' LATEST COUNTERPROPOSAL (REFTEL) STRIKE ENTERED ITS 19TH DAY JANUARY 16 WITH WHAT STRIKERS CLAIM TO BE 1,200 PEOPLE NOW PARTICIPATING, INCLUDING FORMER BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT SILES. MINERS HAVE ANNOUNCED 48-HOUR SYMPATHY STRIKE TO BEGIN JANUARY 17. GOB HAS COUNTERED WITH A 24AHOUR STRIKE IN LA PAZ JANUARY 16 BY 12 UNIONS, INCLUDING TRANSPORT WORKERS, IN SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT. STRIKE HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE AND MOST STORES AND RESTAURANTS IN LA PAZ ARE CLOSED. REPRESENTATIVES OF WOLA, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND ONE OTHER CHURCH GROUP ARRIVED IN LA PAZ OVER WEEKEND, AND HAVE MET WITH AMBASSADOR. WOLA REPRESENTATIVE MENTIONED POSSIBILITY OF VISIT OF STAFF CODEL FROM HOUSE FOREIGN RELATIONS
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COMMITTEE. END SUMMARY.

2. JANUARY 13 GOB REJECTED LATEST PROPOSAL FROM PERMANENT ASSEMBLY ON HUMAN RIGHTS (PAHR) WHICH HAS ASSUMED LEADERSHIP OF HUNGER STRIKE. GOB AND PAHR APPEARED TO DIFFER PRINCIPALLY ON TWO POINTS. FIRST, RE THE PAHR DEMAND FOR AN UNRESTRICTED AMNESTY, THE GOB SAYS IT IS WILLING TO EXTEND THE AMNESTY TO ALL

BOLIVIANS FORCED INTO EXILE FOR POLITICAL OR TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES EXCEPT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE VIOLATED EXISTING BOLIVIAN LAWS. THE PAHR REJECTS THE EXCEPTION BECAUSE, UNDER THE LAW OF SECURITY OF THE STATE AND THE DECREE OF NOVEMBER 9, 1974, WHICH PROHIBITED ALL POLITICAL ACTIVITY, THE GOB CAN CLAIM THAT ALL POLITICAL EXILES HAVE VIOLATED EXISTING LAWS SIMPLY BY HAVING ENGAGED IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND THUS ARE UNABLE TO RETURN FROM EXILE. THE SECOND POINT OF CONTENTION LIES WITH THE PAHR DESIRE TO AMPLIFY THE PREVIOUS DEMAND FOR THE REINSTATEMENT OF MINERS FIRED FOR POLITICAL OR TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES TO COVER ALL REPEAT ALL BOLIVIAN WORKERS FIRED FOR SUCH ACTIVITIES.

3. STRIKE HOW HAS, ACCORDING TO PRESS AND PAHR, 1,200 ADHERENTS IN MOST MAJOR CITIES OF BOLIVIA. IN SANTA CRUZ SOME 15 PERSONS ENTERED A PARISH CHURCH EVENING OF JANUARY 13 TO BEGIN STRIKE. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, POLICE AND SOLDIERS BROKE DOWN THE DOORS AND WINDOWS OF THE CHURCH AND FORCIBLY REMOVED STRIKERS. THEIR LOCATION IS PRESENTLY UNKNOWN. LA PAZ ARCHBISHOP MANRIQUE LABELED VIOLATION OF CHURCH BY POLICE "SACRILEGE" AND ANNOUNCED URGENT MEETING OF ALL BOLIVIAN ARCHBISHOPS TO REVIEW SITUATION (MANRIQUE IS A PROMINENT SUPPORTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA AND JANUARY 12 TOLD EMBOFF HE WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH GOB ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE HUNGER STRIKE.)

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4. AMONG LATEST ADHERENTS TO STRIKE IS DR. LUIS ADOLFO SILES SALINAS, FORMER PRESIDENT OF BOLIVIA AND CO-CHAIRMAN OF PAHR. SILES JOINED STRIKE JANUARY 14 AND HAS MOVED TO COLEGIO SAN CALIXTO, A CHURCH-SUPPORTED SCHOOL IN DOWNTOWN LA PAZ. EMBOFF SPOKE WITH DR. SILES EVENING OF JANUARY 15 AND FOUND HIM, AFTER 30 HOURS OF HUNGER STRIKE, ALERT AND IN GOOD HEALTH.

5. ACCORDING TO EMASSY SOURCES GOB, IN EFFORT TO COUNTER GROWING STRIKE, REQUESTED LABOR COORDINATORS TO TAKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT. LABOR UNIONS, INCLUDING TRANSPORT WORKERS, FACTORY WORKERS, RETAIL CLERKS, RAILROAD AND CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AND OTHERS HAVE RESPONDED WITH 24-HOUR STRIKE IN LA PAZ WHICH BEGAN MIDNIGHT JANUARY 16. STRIKE HAS BEEN HIGHLY EFFECTIVE WITH NO BUSES OR TAXI CABS ON STREETS. AIRPORT IS ALSO CLOSED, ALMOST ALL STORES AND RESTAURANTS AND SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICES ARE CLOSED AND NO NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED FOR JAN 16. WE UNDERSTAND SIMILAR STRIKES WILL OCCUR IN COCHABAMBA AND SANTA CRUZ IF HUNGER STRIKE IS NOT RESOLVED.

6. THERE HAS BEEN NO CONTACT BETWEEN GOB AND STRIKERS SINCE

THE REJECTION JANUARY 13 BY THE GOB OF THE LATEST
COUNTER PROPOSAL OF THE PAHR. CARDINAL MAURER, WHO HAD BEEN
APPOINTED MEDIATOR BY THE GOB RETURNED TO HIS RESIDENCE
IN SUCRE FOLLOWING THE PAHR REJECTION. WHILE DR. SILES
TOLD EMBOFF JAN 16 THAT HE BELIEVES THE GOB, FACED WITH
GROWING NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR STRIKERS,
WILL YIELD IN NEXT FEW DAYS, GOB'S ACTION IN CALLING OUT
TRANSPORT WORKERS MAY INDICATE OTHERWISE. SEVERAL SENIOR
GOB OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD POL/ECON COUNSELOR THAT UNLESS A
RESOLUTION OF STRIKE IS ACHIEVED SOON THE GOB WILL TAKE SOME SORT
OF POLICE ACTION TO "APPLY THE LAW" TO THE STRIKERS. POL/ECON
COUN. URGED THAT WHATEVER ACTION SHOULD BE AS HUMANE AND
CAREFUL AS POSSIBLE.

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7. OVER WEEKEND REPRESENTATIVES OF THREE CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS
ARRIVED IN LA PAZ--JO MARIE GRIESGRABER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
OF WOLA; REV. WILSON BOOTS, REPRESENTATIVE OF WORLD AND
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES; AND FATHER ALLEN MCCOY,
PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION OF MAJOR SUPPORTERS OF MEN
(ANOTHER CHURCH ORGANIZATION). CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES HAVE
VISITED SOME OF STRIKERS IN LA PAZ AND HAVE STATED THEY
BELIEVE TWO OF FIRST FOUR WOMEN TO BEGIN STRIKE ARE IN
VERY SERIOUS CONDITION. CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES MET WITH
AMBASSADOR JANUARY 16 AND EXPRESSED INTEREST IN HELPING
REESTABLISH COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GOB AND STRIKERS. EMBASSY
HELPING TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENTS FOR THEM WITH GOB
OFFICIALS.
BOEKER

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